

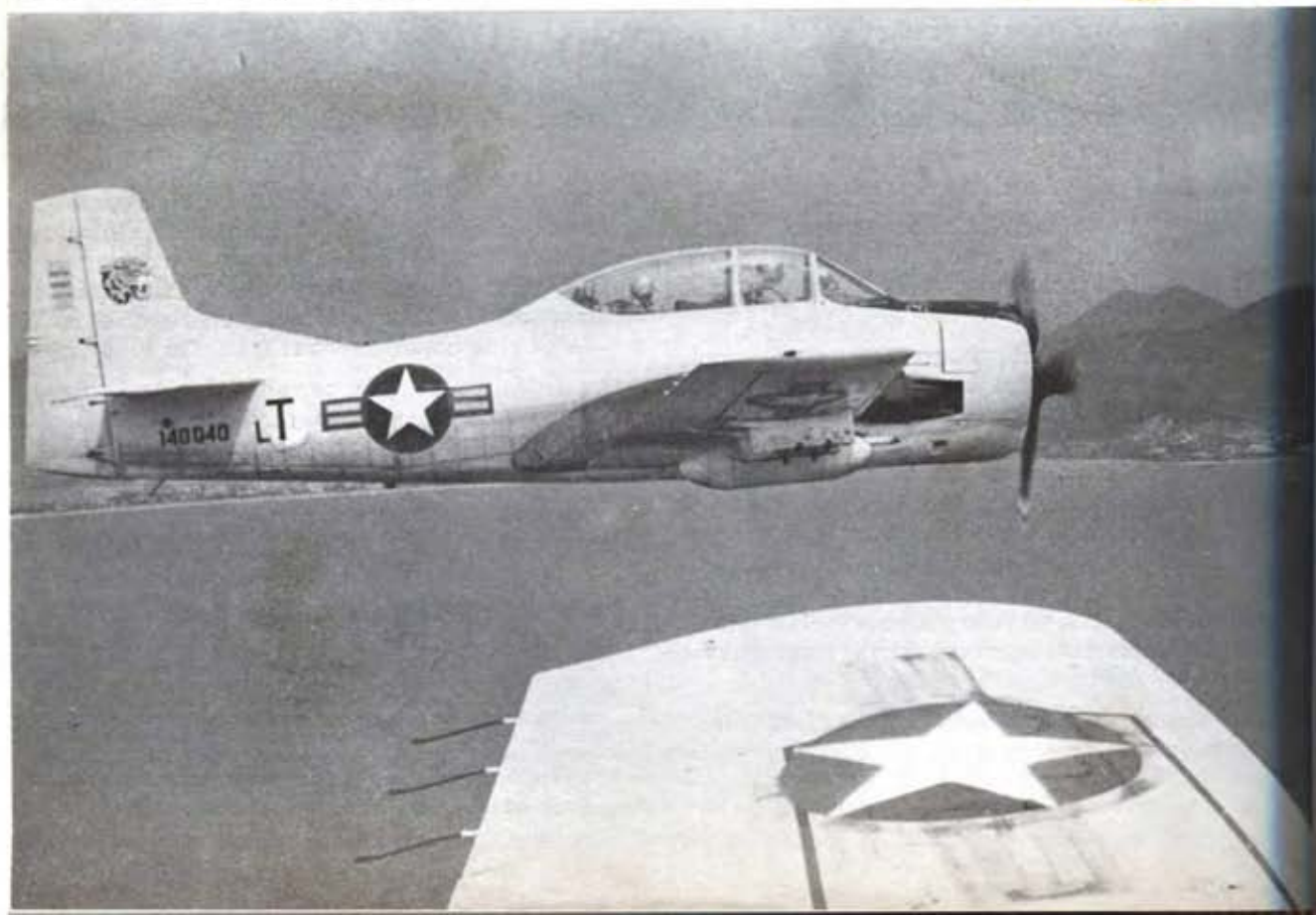


Both the importance and difficulties of air operations in Vietnam are shown here. Muddy trails and dense jungles hamper overland pursuit of guerrillas, but jungle growth obscures enemy moves from the air.

T-28B fighter-bombers bearing tiger-head emblem of South Vietnam's 516th Fighter Squadron climb over Nha Trang Bay en route to a combat strike against guerrillas operating just beyond mountains across the water.

Operating over some of the world's worst terrain, where it's a tough job just to find the enemy, a small, select force of pilots, using a variety of aging equipment, defends the free-world frontier . . .

THE AIR WAR IN VIETNAM



IN AN age of intercontinental missiles and space shots, the air war in Vietnam is a throwback to a strange and ancient era. There is no enemy air resistance. But at the low levels at which Vietnamese and US aircrews operate, even small arms fire can be deadly, and sabotage by Viet Cong infiltrators is an ever-present danger.

Seeking out the elusive enemy, pinpointing targets hidden under dense jungle canopy, flying fighter escort for helicopters, or clearing the way for airborne assaults calls for aircraft with a variety of weapons and the ability to fly fast or slow. Here the World War II B-26 Invader, the A-1H Skyraider (formerly AD-6), and the T-28B trainer have proved well adapted to the job. The versatile C-123 (see front cover) drops paratroops, hauls food and weapons to remote fortified outposts, and evacuates the sick and wounded.

South Vietnam's Flying Tigers, trained in US pilot schools and assisted by USAF advisers, are becoming expert in these unusual techniques. In turn, US Air Commandos are gaining vital combat experience in their mission of training free-world forces to prevent or win guerrilla war.



Napalm from a Vietnamese T-28 hits dead center in the longhouse barracks of Communist guerrilla forces. Besides destroying the encampment, Vietnamese pilots raked the surrounding area with bullets and rockets.



South Vietnamese troops are checked out before boarding a C-123 in Operation Phi Hoa II in March, a tactical air-ground envelopment strike against a force of hard-core Viet Cong regulars fifty miles from capital city of Saigon.



After B-26s and A-1Hs had worked over the Phi Hoa II drop zone with frag bombs, sixteen C-123s dropped 840 Vietnamese paratroops in two minutes. Army H-21 helicopters followed with 1,500 more troops.

The Air War in Vietnam



Pilots of Vietnam's 516th Fighter Squadron form up over Nha Trang Bay for finale of first anniversary air show. Most of them took pilot training in the US, followed by intensive combat training under USAF advisers in Vietnam.



During formal ceremonies on the Nha Trang Air Base ramp marking the Squadron's first anniversary, a pilot hero of Vietnam's "Strategic Hamlet" program receives a floral garland presented by the hamlet patriarch and his daughter.



Crewmen help Capt. Pham Long Suu, 516th Commander, out of cockpit after a strike against Viet Cong targets. He is a USAF Air University graduate.

SOUTH Vietnam's 516th Flying Tiger Squadron celebrated its first anniversary early in March with an air show at its Nha Trang Air Base. The tiger bears a special meaning for Vietnamese who admire and fear its deadly power, its speed, and cunning skill. Thousands of Vietnamese came to watch the show.

Formal ceremonies included a salute to Col. Huyer Huu Hien, Commander of the South Vietnamese Air Force; to Brig. Gen. Robert Rowland, Chief of the USAF Military Assistance Advisory Group in Vietnam; and to Capt. Pham Long Suu, 516th Squadron Commander.

The squadron had plenty to celebrate. Organized a year ago, it flew twelve combat missions in its first month, stepping up operations rapidly as it gained more pilots and planes until it now flies more than 400 a month.

Captain Suu, who began flying in 1953, holds Pilot License No. 1 in South Vietnam. In more than 200 combat missions, his plane has been hit by enemy fire more often than all other planes in his squadron combined. The Viet Cong have come to know and fear his plane and are anxious to bring it down.

But Captain Suu shrugs off the dangers. "My pilots," he says, "are *all* tigers."

Thousands of Vietnamese—possibly including some Viet Cong guerrillas—lined the beach to see the 516th's Flying Tigers demonstrate tactical firepower and close-support techniques in anniversary show.



Body of Capt. John F. Shaughnessy of Houston, Tex., is borne by his fellow Air Commandos and 2d Air Division pallbearers through a Vietnamese honor guard to be flown home for burial. He was one of three Americans who died in early February in two B-26s which crashed during air strikes against Viet Cong Red guerrillas.

TWENTY Air Force men have been killed in Vietnam—ten in combat and ten in other accidents. Three USAF fatalities occurred in early February, both in B-26s. On February 3, Capt. J. F. Shaughnessy and J. P. Bartley crashed on a combat strike. Three days later a B-26 piloted by Maj. James R. O'Neill lost power in both engines. He kept the plane aloft long enough for his navigator and observer to bail out before he died.

At services for the three, Brig. Gen. R. H. Anthis, 2d Air Division Commander, said: "Our tasks and our sacrifices are no less important to the entire free world than to the people of South Vietnam."



USAF Air Commandos render final salute to three B-26 crewmen in planeside services at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, before bodies were flown back to US. Ten airmen—seven Americans, three Vietnamese—have died in B-26 crashes.



USAF Maj. Herbert Stallings is adviser to Vietnam's 516th Fighter Squadron, commanded by Capt. Pham Long Suu. In instructing 516th pilots, Major Stallings has logged 100 combat missions; Suu more than 200.



Heavily armed B-26s in Vietnam carry more armament under wings than B-17s carried internally in WW II, plus fourteen .50-caliber guns. Weapon mix includes 2.75-inch rocket pods, fragmentation and general purpose bombs, and flares. They also carry reconnaissance cameras.



Navy A-1H employed by a second Vietnamese fighter squadron, the 514th FS, carries load of frag bombs and rockets along with .50-caliber machine guns.



Capt. John T. Golding, wounded while piloting L-19 as a forward air controller directing T-28 strikes against Viet Cong, receives Purple Heart from Gen. Emmett O'Donnell, Jr., PACAF Commander, on visit to USAF units in South Vietnam.



USAF Air Commando crewmen load 2.75-inch rockets in wing pod of B-26 bomber. Commandos, based at Hurlburt Field, Fla., rotate to Vietnam for periods of four to six months.



This jet-assisted C-123 assault transport being field-tested in Vietnam uses drag chute to deliver heavy cargo loads in isolated areas without actually landing. Wide track gear permits landing on grass or sand.



Capt. Donald J. Maxwell and Waldo H. Miller receive DFCs from Brig. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, 2d Air Division Commander. Seven others, since reassigned, also won award.

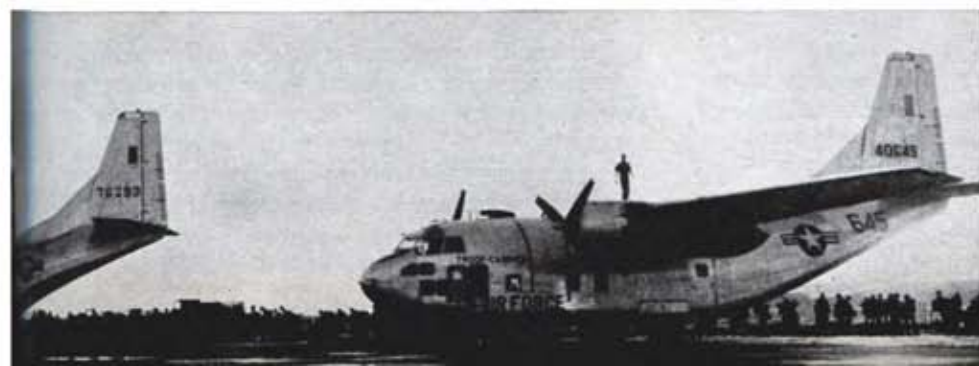


L. W. A. Blackburn, who has logged 650 combat support hours, was one of twenty-seven USAF pilots awarded Vietnamese AF wings by Col. Huyen Huu Hien, VNAF chief.

AIR transport is vital to the South Vietnamese campaign against Communist invaders. Moving personnel and supplies by surface means—roads and canals—is slow and highly susceptible to ambush. The strategy calls for establishment of fortified hamlets to safeguard natives, food, and supplies from guerrilla depredations, and to serve as military bases from which to clear the Viet Cong from the surrounding countryside and set up more fortified villages.

C-123s of PACAF's 2d Air Division are the life-line connecting these hamlets. When not engaged in paratroop operations, the aircraft haul food and supplies, ferry civilians in and out, carry military personnel and weapons, and perform aeromedical missions.

This, then, is the air war in Vietnam—dangerous, dirty, but never dull. US airmen there are once again demonstrating USAF capability to operate in any environment from the jungle to space in defending the cause of freedom.—END



Vietnamese paratroopers are silhouetted against morning sun as they assemble gear before loading into USAF C-123 transports for an assault mission against Viet Cong guerrillas. Airborne operations are indispensable element of Vietnam war where road convoys are open to ambush.